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Philip Melanchthon on Time and History in the Reformation¹

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“*Ey! Wie ein undoctorliche rede ist das!*” With these words, Philip Melanchthon put a visiting scholar at Martin Luther’s table in his place when it came to the question of time. The story, which comes to us from several sources, goes like this.

The Luthers were entertaining an out-of-town (perhaps foreign) guest and had invited Melanchthon and Justus Jonas, another Wittenberg professor, to dine with them. After dinner, talk turned to the question of measuring and understanding time and calendars. The visiting doctor exclaimed that such concerns were foolish; the farmers in his parish needed no calendar or star chart to tell them when it was summer or winter. Luther shot a glance at Melanchthon, worried that Wittenberg’s logician, known for his sharp tongue, might let the poor man have it. Instead, Melanchthon replied with a single remark – and in German no less – rather uncharacteristic for Germany’s premier Latinist but done perhaps so that the man could not understand him. “*Ey! Wie ein undoctorliche rede ist das!*” (“Oy, what an unprofessorial comment that is!”) In one of his own accounts of the story, Melanchthon added, “I wanted to say, ‘It is a dumb jackass remark.’” Another account of the incident noted that throughout the rest of the evening, Jonas and Luther would repeat Melanchthon’s remark to each other as a joke.²

For Melanchthon, a man who owned a pocket watch, studied the stars, composed poems to commemorate eclipses, and wrote an enormously popular world history, time and history were no laughing matters. Instead, they gave human beings a glimpse of God’s work in the world as it lurched toward final judgment. Time and history also served humanity in its quest to govern life in this world. Only human creatures possessed a sense of time. Thus, to give proper tribute to a fellow church historian, it behooves us to consider the contributions of Wittenberg’s other reformer on this important topic.

At first reading, however, Melanchthon's contributions may seem hopelessly out-of-date. Here was a man who thought astrology a science, imagined the world was but 5,500 years old, and anticipated the immanent collapse of the cosmos and its powers, which revolved around that world. For these reasons, borrowing a phrase from the recently-deceased Reformation historian Heiko Oberman, we will ourselves need to "break the historical sound barrier" in order to allow the very peculiarity of Melanchthon's perspective on time and history to refine our own. As we shall see, the ways Melanchthon integrated time and history and allowed them to serve both society and the church provide useful correctives to our own waste of time and ignorance of history.

Time

The man owned a watch!³ This fact alone, remarkable for its time, serves notice on just how important time was to Melanchthon. I am of the opinion that this watch was a gift from the city fathers in Nuremberg, presented to the visiting Melanchthon in 1530 out of gratitude for his tireless work on the Augsburg Confession earlier that year, a confession which Nuremberg had cosigned with their Saxon guests, who passed through Nuremberg on their way back from the Diet of Augsburg to Wittenberg in 1530. Although its single hand was only accurate to the half hour, it made a statement about how "*doktorlich*" its owner was. Its engraving, "To God alone the glory!" although probably the words of the donor and not the owner, stated what for Melanchthon was also a given: that time is a gift of God.

No wonder, then, that one of the most in-depth looks at time by Melanchthon came on New Year's Day, probably in 1556. First, a word about the source for these comments. Already in the 1530s it had become clear to the teachers at Wittenberg that their foreign students – and there were many of them – had difficulty understanding the lengthy Sunday sermons, delivered in German by Luther, Johannes Bugenhagen and others. For their sakes, Philip Melanchthon began to gather these students in his home early Sunday morning to discuss in Latin, at that time the language of all universities, the Gospel appointed for that day. Before too long, the number of listeners, which included many German speakers as well, overflowed his living quarters and forced him to transfer their meetings to a university lecture hall. A first harvest of this work

appeared in 1544, with the publication of his annotations on the Gospel readings for the church year.⁴ A second collection appeared in 1594-95, well after his death. It consisted of notes out of lectures from the 1550s and included a large number of stories and reminiscences that Melanchthon characteristically edited out of his published works, including two versions of the story with which I began my remarks.

It is from this later collection that we have Melanchthon's most detailed comments on time.⁵ In fact, the material here has some of the markings of a declamation, including an opening prayer for the New Year, a frequent replacement for an exordium in Melanchthon's speeches.⁶ Melanchthon invoked the Trinity for protection in the coming year, especially for the church and godly studies. He then defended such prayers at the beginning of a year (or at any beginning) with a reference to Gregory of Nazianzus, who, like St. Paul, had said that God is the beginning and ending of all things.⁷

Despite such a pious introduction, Melanchthon's tone immediately changed, and his comments began to sound more like a scholarly argument. He posed what at first glance appears to be a theoretical question: "Whether it is godly to discern times, distinguish years and set up ways to distinguish days?" The initial response was simple: in Genesis 1 God himself set the lights in the heavens as signs of times, days and years, thereby demonstrating God's intention for the heavenly bodies. However, in a form reminiscent of Wittenberg's own academic disputations, Melanchthon immediately posed a contrary biblical passage: that Paul in Colossians had prohibited the observation of days and festivals. This text would clearly seem to disapprove reckoning times.

In reality, discussion of this apparent contradiction in Scripture was not an exercise in theological speculation but pointed to actual opponents of Melanchthon's position.⁸ Indeed, some super-Lutheran pastors at the court in Weimar, Johann Aurifaber and Johann Stoltz, had begun in 1554 to attack in Luther's name astrological predictions.⁹ By 15 February of the same year (the day before his birthday), Melanchthon had written an oration, delivered by Wittenberg's some-time rector, Matthias Plochinger, attacking those who denigrated the study of time and the stars.¹⁰ What we have both in the oration and in the New Year comments constitutes a response to these attacks.

Melanchthon's solution to the objections raised by Aurifaber and Stoltz matched his solution years earlier to Paul's prohibition of philosophy in Colossians 2:8. Just as Paul did not condemn all uses of philosophy, so here Paul is not condemning all uses of time in Colossians, only superstitious ones. Uses of time that arise from nature, politics or the church stand under no such strictures. Thus, for example, Paul's condemnation of "days and festivals" does not prohibit physicians from marking the course of an illness over a period of time.

Although Melanchthon quickly went on to discuss the subject at hand less polemically, his anger at these attacks was always simmering just beneath the surface of his remarks.¹¹ No wonder he recollected the story of the *unductorliche Rede* at Luther's table, introducing it by insisting that already the Hebrew Patriarchs studied the stars. As he told his students in the same sermon:

When some cite Luther, they are doing great injury to him, although some of them scarcely saw Luther or had little familiarity with him. I often spoke with him about these things, so that I may certainly affirm that he thought with reverence about the order [of the heavens]. I enjoyed a most familiar intimacy with him for thirty years. Those unlearned jackasses use Luther's name as a pretext not for the study of the truth but out of malice, to filch gold from the common folk because they know that such people find diversion in this barbaric clamoring.¹²

Having dismissed the major objection to studying time and the heavenly bodies that mark it, what did Melanchthon say positively about the subject in these remarks? First, he went to great lengths to define terms, typical of Melanchthon's approach to any subject.¹³ Here we catch glimpses of the treasures of Renaissance humanism that permeated every thinker's approach to any subject in this age. Melanchthon began defining the word "year" by citing Vergil's *Georgics*, 2, 401, where (in J. B. Greenough's translation) the great Latin poet wrote "As on its own track rolls the circling year."¹⁴ The blend of poetry, theology and science, long since lost in our compartmentalized world, is alive and well in the world of this Renaissance man. Then, using the half-fanciful, half-accurate etymologies that dot many Renaissance works, Melanchthon traced the origin of the Latin *annus* to the Hebrew *shannah*, claiming that (like Vergil's poem) the Hebrew word for year means change or revolution.

When does the year properly begin? Melanchthon, who regularly noted in his letters that the creation of Adam and Eve occurred on 25 March, argued that the Jewish church (Melanchthon's term for Old Testament believers) in the Mosaic account of Exodus 12 rightly began the year with the Vernal Equinox. However, Melanchthon also listed other nations' beginning points for the year. He explained away the apparent contradiction in Leviticus 25:9, which placed the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah, in September/October by distinguishing the common year, by which the Hebrews listed festivals and which began with the Passover, and the "economic year," tied to the fall harvest and the payment of taxes, annuities and the like.¹⁵

He then investigated the differences between the lunar and solar calendars. Months arose from God's will to divide the year and human necessity to calculate the whole by breaking it into parts.¹⁶ But the year is also divided into quarters through the seasons. These were special times for a nation to come together, Melanchthon argued, and he derived the word calendar from the Greek *απο του καλειν* (calling out). Rejecting Ovid's notion that there were once ten months, he insisted that Scripture rightly divided the year into twelve lunar months, adding ten inter-calendar days to make up for differences with the solar year.¹⁷

Why do these two kinds of years exist side by side? Melanchthon's answer unexpectedly turned to the church's tradition and its love for allegory. One cannot miss the curious blend of literary tropes and scientific observation in his comments.

I often think that something of a mystery is proposed to us in the distinction of the lunar and solar years, because the moon signifies the church and the sun Christ. The moon is somewhat darkened, has imperfections, and variations. Nor do its motions compute so precisely. Christ makes additions to complete those things that are lacking in us.¹⁸

We will examine Melanchthon's discussion of the role of history and why the church has preserved the entire history of the world in its Scripture below. After that discussion, Melanchthon then turned to the four seasons, examining the meaning of their Latin names. Here he inadvertently revealed one of the classical models and sources for his discussion, the Latin writer Marcus Terentius Varro. In his book on agriculture, which deals with the seasons, Varro linked the Latin *ver* [Spring] to *virendo*, because everything becomes green.¹⁹ On the

contrary, Melanchthon and modern linguists link it to the Greek equivalent, *εαρ*. But Melanchthon, in turn, connected the Greek word to the Hebrew month, אֵיר, which falls in April and May. Even the German comes in for a bow, and Melanchthon imagined that the German designation for Spring, *Lentz*, came from *glentz*, because the earth shines. The Latin for Summer, *aestas*, was associated with heat (also in Greek) and with the Hebrew equivalent.²⁰ Autumn came, so Melanchthon and most nineteenth-century linguists, from *augendo*, to increase. *Hyems*, winter, also came from the Greek *ὑειν*, to rain (actually it is related to the word for snow).

Whatever the merit of Melanchthon's technical description, it shows a keen interest in what one might call a scientific approach to the subject. Yet, God is never far from his mind. Thus, Melanchthon tied the changes in the seasons to God's providential moistening of the earth in winter to rejuvenate it from summer's heat and to God's providential warming of the earth in summer to excite growth and mature the earth's fruits. Melanchthon also told his students that, as the poet Horace recounted in *Carmina* 1, 17, 17, certain signs of the zodiac corresponded to the changes of season. The fact that sometimes the seasons are less than predictable indicated to Melanchthon the power of human sin and, at the same time, the power of the conjunction of certain planets in astrological signs.²¹ However superstitious we may find such connections, for Melanchthon they were scientific – according to his definition of the term – and theological. After all, he argued, if the sun and moon have such obvious effects on weather and tides, then surely the stars and planets, which for him were not very far away, must also exercise some power in such matters and in matters of health.²² The science may be, by our lights, all wrong, but the intent – an explanation of the world grounded in science, philosophy, and history – was not.²³

In his New Year remarks, Melanchthon turned to the names of the months, noting that Hebrew names were particularly fitting because they reflected nature. אֵיר (April/May) was related to the Latin *herba*, vegetation; אֲבִיב (March/April) came from barley, which was planted then; חֲשׂוּי (September/October) from new wine; and כֶּסֶל (November/December) from the constellation Orion, which rises at that time. By contrast, Greek and Near Eastern names designated sacrifices. Although some German names derived from the Latin, some did not, and they seemed closer to the Hebrew reflection of

nature. Thus, February (*Hornung* in early new High German) came in Melanchthon's view from the word for horror or cold, because of the climate (it actually comes from an old word for pairing, which begins then among animals). The Latin and German for March is related to Mars, the God of War and April to the Latin *aperio*, to open up. May derives its name from one of the Pleiades, Maja, which rises then. June is in old German Brachmonat, for breaking open the earth; July is Heumonat, the month for haying. The Latin numbered months take their numbers from their distance to the (correct) beginning of the year, March. (That is, if March is the first month, September would be the seventh.) German is much more practical, Melanchthon added, labeling the fall months: Herbstmonat (the beginning of Autumn)], Weinmonat, Wintermonat, and finally Christmonat, for Christ's birth.

This detailed analysis, doubtless dependent upon classical and Renaissance sources, climaxed with Melanchthon's moving peroration, where he united his "scientific" interest in time and stars to the work of God.

These things that I have said about distinguishing times you ought to consider not only for their utility in everyday life but above all and most greatly for the glory and honor of God, who is the Architect of this beautiful order. And those who are particularly intelligent ought to try the study of astronomy, because God gives these arts to humans, so that they may serve as testimonies to God and providence. As Plato says most sweetly, "Pleasing report about God is scattered in the arts,"²⁴ that is, the order itself in numbers, in proportions, in the certainty of motions, in physical considerations, in the distinction of days and nights, in the changes of summer and winter, and likewise the order of apprehending such things in the mind – all witness that nature did not flow together from Democrites' atoms, but that there is a wise and good Architect Mind. Also Paul says [par. of Acts 17:27], "therefore God is truly present, so that he can almost be touched." The obliteration of these testimonies of divine providence is nothing but diabolical clamoring. Let us, rather, love modesty and think about God, the author of all nature. This wisdom is greater than to shout against and curse the good arts.²⁵

This grand mix of Platonic philosophy, Pauline theology and biting polemic combined to strengthen students' faith, to open their minds to the beautiful testimony to God found in time itself, and to refute real opponents. Nowhere does this testimony to the God-given

nature of time ring out more clearly than in Melanchthon's view of history to which we now turn.

History

When speaking about Melanchthon's view of history, we must first come to grips with the fact that in his mind he was dealing with less than 5,525 years of it, from creation to the present, and that he knew with certainty that that history was going to end within the next 475 years. This very narrow circumscription of the topic profoundly affected his historical writings, most of all his world history, that is, his published lectures on the *Chronicon Carionis*. This perspective makes that work sound at times more like a mystery story, with a limited number of facts and a focused goal, rather than like an open-ended history, such as one might write today. Moreover, Melanchthon painted world history on a much grander, theological canvass. For him, world history interacted at every turn with the history of the church. Moreover, history in all of its permutations was part and parcel of both theology and what we would call today political science.

Melanchthon's diverse comments on and attempts at historical writing and analysis would require a book, not an essay. Therefore, here we will focus on certain aspects of the preface to his most important historical work, the *Chronicon Carionis*. In 1531, Philip Melanchthon received a manuscript of a German chronicle of world history written by Johannes Carion, an acquaintance of Melanchthon since his student days in Tübingen and at the time a diplomat and astrologer at the court of the Brandenburg elector in Berlin.²⁶ This is the same person from whom Melanchthon had received horoscopes for Albrecht of Mainz and Martin Luther the year before.²⁷ Melanchthon immediately set about making improvements to the manuscript and had it published in 1532.²⁸ A Latin version, with which Melanchthon was not completely pleased, appeared in 1537, translated by Hermann Bonnus, later reformer in Osnabrück and Lübeck.²⁹ In the 1550s, Melanchthon himself put his hand to revising the Latin version, based upon his own lectures. The result was an explosion in the text's size, from 450 pages to, in just those sections that Melanchthon completed, well over 700.³⁰ The first volume appeared in April 1558 and covered the period from creation to Caesar Augustus.³¹ The second followed shortly thereafter in March

1560 and reached Charlemagne.³² After Melanchthon's death in April, Caspar Peucer, his son-in-law, brought the work up to the present with two more volumes.³³

These volumes were enormously popular. A cursory examination of various bibliographical resources turned up between 1558 and 1624 twenty-eight Latin printings of one or more volumes, eight printings of a fresh German translation, and two of a French translation. It was published in as diverse places as Wittenberg, Frankfurt am Main, Basel, Geneva and Lyons. It was probably used as a history textbook in the academies of Wittenberg and Geneva.

In the preface to the reworked *Chronicon Carionis* Melanchthon traced his own interest in history back to Johannes Reuchlin and a (frankly inaccurate) story about the humanist sodality at the Palatine electoral court in Heidelberg during the late fifteenth century. Melanchthon held this particular court in high esteem, since his father, the armorer for the Palatine Elector Philip the Upright, had named his first-born son after his employer. At this court, as Melanchthon never tired of recounting,³⁴ were gathered among others Johannes Reuchlin (Melanchthon's relative by marriage and famous humanist and Hebraist who gave Melanchthon the Greek form of his name), the bishop of Worms, Johann von Dalberg (who was chancellor of the Palatinate under Elector Philip) and Rudolph Agricola (the humanist whose book on dialectics profoundly influenced Melanchthon's own method).³⁵ In their deliberations with Philip the Upright, these three men would often recollect distinguished examples from Persian, Greek, or Roman history. They got the prince so excited about studying history, that, acknowledging the necessity of distinguishing various periods of nations and empires, he urged them to write a history of the ancient world and its monarchies insofar as they could be known through Hebrew, Greek and Latin sources. At that time, Melanchthon noted, there was no German account of the old empires and not a very good Latin one. Having the leisure to undertake such a project, which also appealed to them, they did as Elector Philip had asked. This manuscript the prince read avidly.³⁶ Melanchthon continued in the preface:

And [Philip the Upright] said how much he was delighted that the sequence of time periods and the memory of the most important actions had been divinely preserved. For they [Reuchlin, von Dalberg, and Agricola] had demonstrated to him that there is a

continued history of the world, so that Herodotus begins his narration a little before the end of the prophetic history.³⁷

Moreover, Melanchthon explained, the prince admitted that history contained testimonies of God's presence in constituting various monarchies as guardians of human society: conjoining its various peoples, restoring laws, judgment and peace, "so that people may be able to learn about God."

Of the many things the *Chronicon* and its preface demonstrate about Melanchthon's view of history, the comments of Elector Philip encapsulate the most important. While Melanchthon admitted that human beings alone among God's creatures have been given a sense of time and history, he also argued that among all nations, only the Hebrews produced a complete history of the world, beginning with creation itself and continuing through Noah, the patriarchs, and the kingdom of Israel. For Melanchthon, a sense of history was hardwired into Hebrew and, by extension, Christian consciousness.³⁸ Thus, not only is he interested, as were all humanists, in the *exempla* that classical history could provide the moral philosopher or rhetorician, but also, using words put into the mouth of his namesake Philip the Upright, Melanchthon was concerned for the *series temporum* and *historia continuata mundi*, that is, "the sequence of time periods" and "the continued history of the world."³⁹

Moreover, he never missed an opportunity to connect the study of time and history to the providence of God. Here, Philip the Upright's comments provided two examples of this divine work. On the one hand, God preserved the *memoria* of history. This profoundly Augustinian (and neo-Platonic) term meant that the very recollections by the prophets (especially preserved in Samuel, Kings and Chronicles), by Herodotus and by others were not a matter of chance but of divine mercy.⁴⁰ They constituted one of the natural gifts of God to humanity.

But memory of things said and done is not simply a matter of commemoration but, as Günter Frank points out, goes hand in hand for Melanchthon with the sequencing of these events. It is the *series temporum* and the *historia continuata* that moved Melanchthon's ideal prince, Philip the Upright. Here, true history was not simply a recounting of salvation history—the lives of saints and the history of the church. Melanchthon with the *Chronicon Carionis* achieved something else. He managed to combine the history of the world and the church into a whole, albeit not always a seamless whole.⁴¹

How could he manage this? Melanchthon's theology rested upon a basic distinction between human and divine righteousness.⁴² God was about the business of preserving order in this world (human righteousness) and forgiving sin in anticipation of the world to come (divine righteousness). Thus, both actions of God were legitimate topics by which to weave together the *series temporum*.⁴³ On the one side, as in the words Melanchthon put in the mouth of the elector, this meant that especially political history demonstrated God's providential care for all humanity in constituting various monarchies as guardians of human society who conjoin its various peoples and restore laws, judgment and peace.

On the other side, throughout the ages God has also been in the business of preserving from the power of tyrants the church, that small, persecuted "God-taught" assembly.⁴⁴ This battle, which began with the murder of Abel by Cain, plays itself out throughout history, as witnessed to in Scripture by the struggle of Elijah against the prophets of Baal, Christ against the Pharisees and scribes, and Paul against the pseudo-apostles.⁴⁵ This same struggle also appeared throughout the later history of the church, marked by the heretical teaching of Origen, of Pelagius, and, in the centuries leading up to the Reformation, of the monks and scholastic theologians. As God raised up prophets like Elijah and apostles like Paul, God also raised up church fathers like Augustine and, in these last days, one Martin Luther to proclaim the "old, old story."⁴⁶

This approach to history meant for Melanchthon that, to use an old saw, "the more things change, the more they remain the same." As Irena Backus of the University of Geneva has most recently demonstrated, Melanchthon's view of history contains no sense of change or development, no *heilsgeschichtliche* notion of advance, such as what one finds among both Roman Catholic and Calvinist writers of the time.⁴⁷ Melanchthon and the Lutherans who followed him saw church history more as a playing field for a grand struggle between truth and its distortion, between God and the devil. At the same time, however, because of these two kinds of righteousness, there is another battle playing itself out between the forces of chaos and the good order of a well-run, just state. And often the tyranny of injustice in the secular realm spelled persecution for the true church, just as the upholding of justice in earthly matters often led to protection for the church by godly princes.

This approach to history also meant that historical figures lose many of their unique qualities and are more often than not depicted as one-dimensional figures, either in league with God or the devil.⁴⁸ Yet, it would be a mistake to imagine that Melanchthon, incapable of anything else, merely reduced these figures to *exempla* for human beings to follow or avoid. In fact, Melanchthon has no trouble heaping both praise and blame (to use rhetorical terms with which he would have been familiar) upon these characters, as they either supported good laws and the true church or committed injustice and persecuted believers. Moreover, as he stated in the introduction to the original *Chronicon Carionis* of 1532, he intended to portray characters in this simple way.⁴⁹

A helpful analogy for describing Melanchthon's craft as an historian might be to compare him to Lucas Cranach, Wittenberg's famous painter. In Melanchthon's own textbook on rhetoric, as a way of explaining the differences between plain, moderate and grandiloquent speech, Melanchthon contrasted the artistic styles of Cranach, Dürer and Matthias Grünewald. He wrote:

In paintings, these oratorical differences may be somewhat easier to observe. For Dürer painted everything more grandly and in a varied fashion, with an abundance of lines. Lucas [Cranach]'s pictures are without ornamentation. A comparison shows that, although they are attractive, nevertheless they are quite distinct from Dürer's works. Matthias [Grünewald] preserves the middle.⁵⁰

Cranach's is precisely the approach Melanchthon took to history. He left out Dürer's lines and even the intriguing historical details a la Grünewald and gave the reader peculiarly simple figures so that, like Cranach whose portraits of the Saxon electors all look more or less alike, Melanchthon's historical figures lacked detail. But this very simplicity also avoided the strong idealizations of a Dürer, whose engraving of Melanchthon from 1526, for example, made his head veritably bulge with information. Melanchthon's historical figures are always caught up in important, virtuous duties or vices, depicted in simple terms within a much grander scheme of reality: God's work to preserve human life on earth and the life of the church for the world to come. For Melanchthon, this very simplicity of purpose may be viewed, like Cranach's figures, as a thing of beauty.

The role that God played in Melanchthon's view of time and history underscores the central *theological* core to his historical

thinking. The clear ties between history and God's providence showed themselves to Melanchthon already at the very beginning of history. He stressed that God himself is above history and created it. This statement, of course, has roots in the Parisian condemnations of 1277, which labeled the doctrine of the world's eternity as heretical. Not only did Melanchthon reiterate that very point,⁵¹ but he also applied it to the concept of time and history. Along with everything else God did in creation, God alone established time and history.

Melanchthon detailed the benefits of history for the church in his New Year's sermon of 1556.⁵² What are the reasons that the church, itself established by God in the Garden of Eden,⁵³ preserved a continuous history of the world? First, such a global history causes people to realize the world has a beginning and an end. "God wanted it to be known that the world was not eternal."⁵⁴ There is a limit to human history and a future judgment, including eternal salvation for the elect. God created angels and human beings differently from the beasts, in that we alone understand that there was some beginning to the human race and the visible world.

Second, "God wanted the order and sequence [*series*] of his revelation to be known, at which times and by which testimonies he has handed down his word."⁵⁵ Thereby, the church can recognize the most ancient teachings (always better for any sixteenth-century humanist) and when God sent his Son. This very sequence is recited daily in the Creed. But it is also in Daniel, where he speaks of four empires of 490 years each and says the Lord will come in the fourth.⁵⁶

Finally, history is preserved in the church "so that we may recognize the order of histories not just in the church but also in the rest of the human race."⁵⁷ Here, Melanchthon returned to describe the utility of knowing history in daily life, even in negotiating or litigating private contracts and in other business transactions. Thus, he did not neglect the importance of human righteousness for members of the church itself.

God's role in beginning history received special emphasis from Melanchthon, as did his conviction that God was about to end history. Certainly from the time of the appearance of Halley's Comet in 1531 and even before that time, Melanchthon, like Luther, was convinced that the world would soon come to an end. The rise of the papacy, the onslaught of the Turks, the rediscovery of the gospel all played a role,

as did a reassessment of the apocalyptic literature in the Bible, especially Daniel.⁵⁸ However, perhaps the most important link between the end of the world and Melanchthon's sense of history came through a snippet of the *Cabala*, that Jewish mystical writing whose publication Melanchthon's relative Johannes Reuchlin had defended, this particular portion of which Melanchthon was fond of citing. He attributed the saying to the prophet Elijah, but it was actually the saying of a rabbi with nearly the same name. Although he knew that this saying did not have quite the authority of Scripture, nevertheless he used it unfailingly to demonstrate the nearness of the world's end.⁵⁹

Tradition of the House of Elijah: The world consists of 6,000 years and then the conflagration. Two thousand are empty; two thousand are the law; two thousand the days of the Messiah. And on account of our sins, which are many and great, years will be lacking which will not be fulfilled.⁶⁰

Melanchthon explained the oracle this way. Elijah describes the chief changes in the world's history. The first 2,000 years are called "empty" either (as Melanchthon preferred) because humanity had not yet populated the whole earth or (as others say) because there was not yet a structure to the church separate from the nations, nor (Melanchthon added) were there any empires. Whatever was the cause for this designation, Melanchthon went on to say, the human race, which was not yet so decimated by sin, flourished. Melanchthon measured the second age from the circumcision of Abraham to the Messiah, which was by his reckoning just shy of 2,000 years. Finally, the age of the Messiah, which began at the birth of Christ, would not run its entire course both because of the growth of sin and for the sake of the elect. Melanchthon then divided the *Chronicon Carionis* into three books corresponding to this schema.⁶¹

Although Melanchthon believed the world would soon end, this did not mean that he engaged in speculation about the precise date of its demise. Rather, he was interested in showing through history how the world was decaying and would end soon. This meant that the rise of the papacy and the Turkish threat were particularly central to his view of the more recent history of the world. To underscore this connection to the end of the world, Melanchthon (or his publisher) added a Latin poem to the end of his preface to the second volume of the *Chronicon Carionis*.⁶² This poem, composed by Melanchthon

and originally posted for students on 12 December 1556, expressed Melanchthon's views of political history and faith as he neared the end of time. Using Nebuchadnezzar's vision in Daniel 2 of a gigantic figure composed of a gold head, silver arms, bronze legs and a mixture of iron and clay feet, Melanchthon identified his own age as living in that final kingdom of iron and clay, as he wrote in the following poem.⁶³

You see that parts of the toppled colossus lie around,
 Which the old Chaldean King saw in his castle.
 Only the lowest part of the feet stands, with iron and clay
 Mixed, soon to fall to the ground with its cracks.
 The Turks have destroyed cities and powerful peoples,
 Nor will any race hold power more savagely.
 Therefore the Turks are the iron part of the great soles of the feet,
 And the other kingdoms are the weak clay.^{lxiv}
 But then the Stone not made of hands, torn out from the high
 mountain,
 And the Judge, the Son of God himself, will be present.
 Destroying both iron and clay of the whole and the soles of the feet,
 He will give imperishable kingdoms to his people.
 Therefore may our hearts give themselves to the One begotten of
 God,
 And learn to follow his venerable commands.
 O Logos, Begotten of God, may you be present in our minds,
 And inflame our hearts by your breath.⁶⁵

This poem expresses the future-looking strain in Melanchthon's view of history. Here, as in any human disaster, individual personalities pale in comparison to the calamity itself. Moreover, the impending disaster does not present an excuse for despair but drives to faith. Here, the original purpose of apocalyptic literature – to comfort and sustain the faith of the oppressed – still finds voice and leads in the end of the poem to prayer.

* * *

“God is the beginning and ending of all things.” It is that statement of faith, borrowed from one of Melanchthon's favorite church fathers, Gregory of Nazianzus, and cited in his New Year address, that sustained and focused Melanchthon's view of time and history. Standing near the end of the age, he could use this God-given gift to humans – the sense of time and history – and discover the hand of God, preserving life in this world and bringing in eternal life for

the world to come. Melanchthon thought that a history of the world like the *Chronicon Carionis* would lead youth to long for faith but also to long for the actual sources from which this history had been constructed. It is a tribute to Faith Rohrbough, the teacher of history, that she, like Melanchthon, consistently led her students back to those very sources to gain perspectives on their own age.

Notes

- 1 A form of this essay was first delivered in November 2003 at the Walters Museum in Baltimore, Maryland. It seems a particularly fitting tribute to my former colleague, Faith Rohrbough, whose own scholarly commitment to the history of the church stands in direct line with Melanchthon's work.
- 2 See *Corpus Reformatorum: Philippi Melanthonis opera quae supersunt omnia* [henceforth: CR], edited by Karl Bretschneider and Heinrich Bindseil, 28 vols. (Halle: A. Schwetschke & Sons, 1834-1860) Vol. 20, pp. 549f., 24:204, 25:534, and Johannes Manlius, *Locorum communium collectanea a Iohanne Manlio per multos annos, pleraque tum ex Lectionibus D. Philippi Melanthonis, tum ex aliorum doctissimorum virorum relationibus excerpta, et nuper in ordinem ab eodem redacta*, 4 vols. (Basel: Operinus, 1563), Vol. 1, pp. 49f.
- 3 See Maia Wellington Gahtan and George Thomas, "GOTT ALLEIN DIE EHRE, Engraved on Philip Melanchthon's Watch of 1530," *Lutheran Quarterly*, n.s., 15 (2001):249-72. Although the whereabouts of the watch is unclear before 1910, it should be noted that an accurate sketch of it appears in the biography of Melanchthon from 1898: James William Richard, *Philip Melanchthon: The Protestant Preceptor of Germany 1497-1560* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1898), p. iv.
- 4 *Annotationes in evangelia, quae usitato more diebus dominicis et festis proponuntur* (Wittenberg: Peter Seitz, 1544), now in CR 14:161-528, with the preface to Georg Helt in *Melancthons Briefwechsel: Kritische und kommentierte Gesamtausgabe: Regesten* [henceforth: MBW], edited by Heinz Scheible, 10+ vols. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1977-), no. 3546 (CR 5:560-63 with 14:161 and 20:783, no. IX). According to the *Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachbereich erschienenen Druck des XVI. Jahrhunderts* [henceforth: VD 16], 22+ vols. (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1983-), E 4531-4600 (passim), the work was reprinted separately in Latin fifteen times and in German translation five times. It also appeared in the sixteenth-century

collection of his *Opera omnia* 3:1-246. For more on this and the posthumously published annotations on the gospels, see Timothy J. Wengert, “The Biblical Commentaries of Philip Melanchthon,” in: *Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) and the Commentary*, edited by M. Patrick Graham and Timothy J. Wengert (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 129-30.

- 5 *CR* 24:202-208. See H 639, 640, 658 and especially Hammer’s own comments in *Die Melanchthonforschung im Wandel der Jahrhunderte*, edited by Gerhard Hammer, 4 vols. (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1967, 1968, 1981, 1996), Vol. 1, p. 439. Although, as Hammer points out, this collection contains several inherent weaknesses, it does represent a good cross-section of Melanchthon’s remarks between 1549 and 1560. In the case of comments on January 1, Melanchthon was in Leipzig in 1549 and he had probably departed for Düben in 1554. Otherwise he was in Wittenberg. See *MBW* 10: 596, 607, 619, 631, 641, 651, 662, 675, 686, 700, 711 and 721. Scheible notes the existence of manuscripts for lectures on that day for 1550 and 1551 (Jena UB, Ms. Bos q. 24*, 2 Z 1g. f. 131^v and f. 301^v), 1555 (BAV Cod. Pal. lat. 1832, f. 191^v), 1556 (BAV Cod. Pal. lat. 1831, f. 140^v) and 1559 (Cod. Guelf. 949 Nov., f. 208^v). Because of the attacks on astrology from 1554, it would seem that *CR* 24 should come from 1 January 1555. However, another reference indicates the later date, 1 January 1556. Otto Waltz, “Dicta Melanthonis,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 4 (1880/81), 326, no. 1: “D. Philippus in explicatione evangelii die circumcisionis domini anno 1556 sic dixit. ‘Das das opus positus planetarum vergebens sol gemacht sein, hoc mihi nemo persuadebit. Et qui citant Lutherum faciunt illi maximam injuriam. Ego plus cum illo disputavi de his rebus, quam quisquam istorum asinorum eum viderit, quia mihi fuit familiarissimus per triginta annos.’” Unfortunately, the manuscripts from the Vatican were not available to the author at the time this essay was being written.
- 6 For other examples, see “Quaestio de discrimine annorum apud diversas gentes, et eorum commoditate, proposita a M. Sebastiano Theodorico Winsheimio” (*CR* 10:745-53, dated 4 September 1544), “Quaestio: an leges damnent praedictiones astrologicas” (*CR* 10:712-15, dated 17 April 1536), “Oratio de dignitate astrologiae” (*CR* 11:261-66, dated 18 July 1535; cf. Horst Koehn, “Philip Melanchthons Reden: Verzeichniss der im 16. Jahrhundert erschienenen Drucke,” *Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens*, 25 [1984]:1277-1486, no. 350 [henceforth: Koehn, no. 350]), “Oratio de Astronomia et geographia” (*CR* 11:292-98, dated 1536?, cf. Koehn, no. 106); “Oratio de Orione” (*CR* 12:46-52, dated by this author 15 February 1554 [cf. *MBW* 7086 and *MBW* 10:652]); “Oratio de tertiana febris astrologica experientia et contra Menardum

defensio considerationis astrologicae in medicatione” (dated to 1556; Koehn, no. 202).

7 CR 24:202.

8 Johann Stoltz and Johannes Aurifaber, *Kurtze Verlegung der unchristliche Practica Magistri Johannis Hebenstreits auff des jar 1554 zu Erffurd ausgangen* (Jena: Christian Rödinger, 1554; cf. *VD 16: S 9266*). Johann Hebenstreit produced several such works. For example, a few years later Wittenberg produced his *Des Cometen, so dieses 1556 Jars von dem 5 tag Marcij an, bis auff den 20 Aprilis zu Wittemberg erchienen bedeutung Darinne auch derer meinung, so zween Cometen gesetzt, gründlich refutirt wird* (Wittenberg, 1556). The tract Aurifaber was attacking was much like this one by Hebenstreit: *Prognosticon von allerley seltzamen zufellen des 1559. Jhars* (Erfurt, 1558). Cf. *MBW 7086* (CR 8:226-27), dated 16 February 1554 to Christoph Stathmion.

9 Aurifaber’s attack continued in his most famous work, Martin Luther’s *Tischreden*. There, he devoted an entire section (chapter 70) to the subject, which was extremely critical of Melanchthon. See, for example, Martin Luther, *Colloquia oder Tischreden ... so er in vielen jaren gegen gelehrten Leuthen, auch frembden Gesten und seinen Tischgesellen geführt*, edited by Antonius Lauterbach and Johannes Aurifaber (Frankfurt/Main: Sigmund Feyerabend, 1593), 413^r-415^r (= *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Tischreden* [henceforth: *WATR*], 6 vols. [Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1912-21] 6:349). Aurifaber’s collection can only be understood in light of this earlier fight.

10 *Oratio de Orione, continens commendationem studiorum Astronomiae, et refutationem eorem, qui et in sectantur ac vituperant, et calumniis iniustis praegravant haec studia*. It is a copy of this oration that he sent to Stathmion the next day (*MBW 7086*) and then later begged him not to publish (*MBW 7263*). On the dating of this oration, it is important to note that when it says the world is 5515 years old, this age stretched for Melanchthon from 25 March 1553 to March 1554. Thus, dating this right before he sent off the oration, namely on the day the masters were promoted at Wittenberg, 15 February 1554 (cf. *MBW 10:652*), makes sense. Although the oration may have been written before the publication of Aurifaber and Stoltz’s tract, it is clear that Melanchthon had long since had a good idea what it contained.

11 A good indication of this anger comes in several other letters from this year. Two are addressed to Johann Hebenstreit himself (*MBW 7225* [CR 8:313], dated 27 June 1554, and *MBW 7262* [CR 8:329f.] , dated 18 August 1554), another is to Christoph Stathmion (*MBW 7263* [CR 8:329], dated 18 August 1554), and a final one is to Peter Vicentius in Lübeck (*MBW 7269* [CR 8:225, where it is inexplicably dated 16

- February despite the clear reference to St. Bartholomew's Day], dated 24 August 1554). The fact that one of Hebenstreit's tracts on comets was published in Wittenberg in 1556 is further indication of Melanchthon's approval.
- 12 CR 24:206. See also CR 24:204: "Let no one be so savage or beastly as to condemn the divinely ordained distinction of times. Rather we ought to admire this wisdom of God, which shines in the entire working of the world and in the motions of lights and stars. By this the *assensio* [belief in the reality of sensible experience] is confirmed concerning providence and the first article [of the Creed]."
- 13 See already Timothy J. Wengert, *Philip Melanchthon's Annotations in Johannem in Relation to Its Predecessors and Contemporaries* (Geneva: Droz, 1987), pp. 203-11, and the literature cited in n. 15.
- 14 CR 24:203: "Atque in se sua per vestigia volvitur annus." Later (CR 24:206), he again quoted Vergil, this time his *Ecloga* 3, 57, on Spring: "Tunc [nunc] est formosissimus annus."
- 15 CR 24:207.
- 16 This is crucial to Aristotle's (and Melanchthon's) dialectics.
- 17 CR 24:204. He proved this with reference to Noah's time in the ark, called a year, yet he entered on the 17th of February and disembarked on the 27th (cf. Genesis 7:11 and 8:4).
- 18 CR 24:204.
- 19 See M. Terentius Varro, *Rerum rusticarum de agricultura*, I.xxvii and his *De lingua Latina*, I.x.
- 20 CR 24:206.
- 21 CR 24:206. It was at this juncture that he attacked Aurifaber and Stoltz, cited above.
- 22 See his *Oratio de Orione*, CR 12:50-51. He also thought that moonlight cools the earth, whereas sunlight warms it. At the same time, Melanchthon was no fatalist for he stated (col. 51) that the church is not ruled by the stars but by the Son of God. For more on Melanchthon's view of astrology see Timothy J. Wengert, "Melanchthon and Luther / Luther and Melanchthon," *Luther-Jahrbuch* 66 (1999): 76, especially n. 83.
- 23 For a splendid account of this connection, see Sachiko Kusukawa, *The Transformation of Natural Philosophy: The Case of Philip Melanchthon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- 24 I was unable to discover the origin of this quotation.
- 25 CR 24:207-08. The Platonic designation of God as architect and mind is discussed at length in Günter Frank, *Die Theologische Philosophie*

- Philipp Melancthon's (1497-1560)* (Hildesheim: Benno, 1995), pp. 213-19; and Dino Bellucci, *Science de la Nature et Réformation: La physique au service de la Réforme dans l'enseignement de Philippe Melancthon* (Rome: Vivere In, 1998), pp. 195-217. See also his "Gott als Mens: Die 'aliqua physica definitio' Gottes bei Philipp Melancthon," in *Melancthon und die Naturwissenschaften seiner Zeit*, edited by Günter Frank and Stefan Rhein (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1998), pp. 59-71.
- 26 *MBW* 1159 (*CR* 2:505f.), to Joachim Camerarius in Nuremberg, dated 15 June [1531]. See Heinz Scheible, ed., *Die Anfänge der reformatorischen Geschichtsschreibung* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1966), p. 14, n. 6.
- 27 See *MBW* 1112 and 1113, dated 1 January 1531 to Erasmus Ebner and Johannes Schöner, respectively, both in Nuremberg. Some of Carion's astrological works include *Prognosticatio und erklerung der grossen wesserung...so sich begeben...Fünffzehen hundert und xxiiij Jar* (Leipzig: M. Landsberg, 1521); *Bedeutnus und Offenbarung, warer Hymlicher Influxion, ... Von yharn tzu yharen, werende bis man schreibt M. D. Und xl. yar.* (Leipzig: Nickel Schmidt, 1527); *Bedeutnus und offenbarung warer hymlicher influentz alle Landtschafft und Stend...betreffend, von dem 1540 jar zu jaren werende, biß man schreybt 1550. jar* (Nuremberg: Wachter, ca. 1539); *Außlegung der verborgenen Weissagung...vor verenderung und zufelligem glück der höchsten Potentaten des Römischen Reichs* (Augsburg: Otmar, 1546; *VD* 16:C952).
- 28 In the same letter to Camerarius (*MBW* 1159), he asked for information about Heracles and the ancestors of Alexander the Great. In a letter to Carion himself (*MBW* 1177, dated 17 August 1531), Melancthon mentioned that he had added comments about the prophecy of Elijah (see below). Johannes Carion, *Chronica, durch Magistrum Johan Carion, vleissig zusammen gezogen, meniglich nützlich zu lessen* (Wittenberg: Johannes Rhaw, 1532; *VD* 16:C998).
- 29 Johannes Carion, *Chronica Ioannis Carionis, conversa ex Germanico in Latinum a doctissimo viro Hermanno Bono, & ab autore diligenter recognita* (Schwäbisch Hall: Brubach, 1537; *VD* 16:C1014). A second, corrected edition of the Latin came out in 1546: *Chronicon Ioannis Carionis correctvm & emendatum : complectitur hic libellus apto ordine maximas quasque res gestas,...; una cum indice rerum memorabilium copioso & diligenti* (Frankfurt/Main: Brubach, 1546; *VD* 16:C1017). For Melancthon's displeasure at the document, see Otto Waltz, "Dicta Melancthonis," 326, "Latina versio cronicorum Joan. Carionis multum germanizat, sicuti et ipse qui vertit ad me scripsit, se data opera fuisse liberiolem in vertendo et se multis in locis libenter

germanizasse; alias est bonus et doctus homo.” See also *MBW* 8600 (*CR* 9:531-38, the preface to the first volume of Melanchthon’s version of the *Chronicon*, addressed to Archbishop Sigismund von Magdeburg and dated April 1558), p. 531.

- 30 That is, through the reign of Charlemagne.
- 31 *Chronicon Carionis Latine Expositum Et Auctum Multis Et Veteribus Et Recentibus Historijs, in narrationibus rerum Graecarum, Germanicarum & Ecclesiasticarum* (Wittenberg: Rhau, 1558; *VD* 16:M2697), reprinted in *CR* 12:711-902.
- 32 *Secunda pars chronici Carionis Latine expositi et aucti multis et veteribus et recentibus Historijs, in narrationibus rerum Graecarum, Germanicarum et Ecclesiasticarum : Cui accessit locupletissimus rerum ac verborum memorabilium Index* (Wittenberg: Georg Rhau Erben, 1560; *VD* 16:M2703, reprinted in *CR* 12:901-1094. For the epistle dedicatory, see *MBW* 9269 (*CR* 9:1073-77), dated 25 March 1560, only a few weeks before his death. A poem of Melanchthon, “De Monarchiis,” composed on 12 December 1556 (*CR* 10:635f.) followed the preface. See below.
- 33 *Tertia pars chronici Carionis Latine expositi et aucti multis et veteribus & recentibus Historijs, in narrationibus rerum Graecarum, Germanicarum et Ecclesiasticarum* (Wittenberg, Georg Rhau Erben, 1562; cf. *VD* 16:M2707); *Chronicon Carionis expositum et auctum multis...historiis...ab exordio Mundi usque ad Carolum Quintum Imperatorem* (Wittenberg: Crato, 1572; *VD* 16:M2715). See Uwe Neddermeyer, “Kaspar Peucer (1525-1602): Melanchthons Universalgeschichtsschreibung,” in: *Melanchthon in seinen Schülern*, edited by Heinz Scheible (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997), pp. 69-101.
- 34 Besides *MBW* 8600, see renditions of this story in Manlius, *Locorum*, 3:113-14; Waltz, *Dicta Melanthonis*, 329, no. 17; *MBW* 1857 (*CR* 3:216-19, especially 216f., dated February 1537, a preface for Burchard v. Ursburg’s *Chronicon* [edited by Caspar Hedio], addressed to Count Philip von Pfalz-Neuburg); *MBW* 2169 (*CR* 3:673-76, especially 675f., dated 28 March 1539, a preface addressed to Alard von Amsterdam for Rudolf Agricola’s *Lucubrationes...caeteraque...opuscula* (Cologne: J. Gymnicus, 1539); *MBW* 7909 (*CR* 8:811-15, especially 811f., dated 1 August 1556, a preface addressed to Prince Joachim von Anhalt to Ernst Brotuff’s, *Genealogia und Chronica des Hauses der Fürsten zu Anhalt* [Leipzig: Bärwald, 1556]; *Oratio continens historiam Ioannis Capnionis, Phorcensis* (*CR* 11:999-1010, especially 1004; delivered 28 August 1552, Koehn, no. 179); and an oblique reference in *Oratio de vita Rodolphi Agricolae Frisii* (*CR* 11:438-46, especially 439, delivered 10 July 1539, Koehn, no. 91).

- 35 Von Dalberg died in 1503, falling down the stairs to the wine cellar in his mistress's house during Melanchthon's first visit to Heidelberg as a child. Rudolph Agricola and Johannes Reuchlin were never in Heidelberg at the same time. See Heinz Scheible, *Melanchthon: Eine Biographie* (Munich: Beck, 1997), p. 252.
- 36 Perhaps Reuchlin or Melanchthon was thinking of the work of Johann Trithemius, *Compendium sive Breviarium primi voluminis annalium sive historiarum, de origine Regum et gentis Francorum* (Mainz: Fust & Schöffer, 1515).
- 37 *MBW* 8600 (*CR* 9:533).
- 38 See *MBW* 2138 (*CR* 3:878): "Und ist nicht Zweifel, Historien seyend erstlich bei den heiligen, als Moisi, und zuvor, aus zweien ursachen geschrieben, namlich von wegen der Religion und der Königreiche, daß man wüßte, welches die rechte wahre Religion allezeit gewesen, und wie die Welt von derselbigen abgewichen; item, daß man sehe, wie die weltliche Regierung erstlich auch von Gott geordnet und aus was Ursachen darnach die Regiment gestrafft und verändert." "
- 39 This standard for good history-writing Melanchthon gleaned from Polybius, 1,3f., at least according to *MBW* 2138 (*CR* 3:877f. and Scheible, *Anfänge*, 19, n. 17): "Aber Polybius ... gibt eine nützliche Lehre, daß man nicht allein Stückweis etliche Exempel lernen soll, sondern daß viel nützlicher sey, der Regiment ordentliche Historien zu haben an einander hangend, darin zu sehen, was für Veränderungen, und aus welchen Ursachen zu jeder Zeit in Monarchen, Landen und Städten vorgefallen." "
- 40 See Frank, *Theologische Philosophie*, pp. 82-87. In his helpful discussion, Frank analyzes four important texts: *MBW* 1857 (*CR* 3:216-19, a preface to Caspar Hedio's expanded edition of Burchard of Ursburg's *Chronicon* [Strasbourg, 1537], addressed to Count Philip von Pfalz-Neuburg and dated February 1537); *MBW* 1960 (*CR* 3:440-46, a preface to Francesco Negri von Bassano's Latin translation of Paolo Giovio's *Turcicarum rerum commentarius* [Wittenberg, 1537], addressed to Duke Johann Ernst of Saxony and dated October 1537); *MBW* 2138 (*CR* 3:877-84, a preface to Caspar Hedio's *Ein außßerleßne chronick von anfang der welt* [Strasbourg, 1539], addressed to Count Palatine Ruprecht von Zweibrücken Veldenz and dated the middle of January 1539); and *MBW* 2341 (*CR* 3:1113-17, a preface to a Latin translation of Xenophon's *Opera omnia in tres partes distincta* [Schwäbisch Hall, 1540], addressed to Guillaume du Bellay and dated 4 January 1540).
- 41 For example, compare, in his 1558 *Chronicon Carionis*, the separate sections entitled "De ecclesia" (e.g., *CR* 12:784-87, 897-902, 955-61,

1015-21, 1052-55), with those discussions of the church more fully integrated into the political history (934-35, 971-81 and, on Islam, 1073-81).

- 42 See Timothy J. Wengert, *Human Freedom, Christian Righteousness: Philip Melancthon's Exegetical Dispute with Erasmus of Rotterdam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- 43 A splendid example of these two objects of concern comes in Melancthon's preface to Giovio's *Turcicarum rerum commentarius* (*MBW* 1960 [*CR* 3:440]), where he wrote: "Multae sunt partes in historia ad vitam utiles, sed omnium utilissimae sunt religionum atque imperiorum descriptiones, quarum duarum rerum considerationes maxime digna est praestantibus ingeniis. Et ut ego quidem existimo, haec historiae initiae fuerunt."
- 44 See his original introduction to the 1532 **Chronicon Carionis**, in Scheible, *Die Anfänge*, 18: "Über das sol man fleissig in historien acht haben, das Gott zweierlei reich, das weltlich und die kirch odder reich Christi, angerichtet hat."
- 45 Still the best description of this is Peter Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum* (Geneva: Droz, 1961). See also the description of church history in *MBW* 1857 (*CR* 3:217).
- 46 See Melancthon's orations on Luther. *Oratio in funere D. Martini Lutheri* (*CR* 11:726-34; dated 18 February 1546, Koehn, no. 118), 728; and *Oratio de Martino Luthero, vel de aetatibus diversis ac temporibus Ecclesiae, et dissensionibus Ecclesiarum nostro tempore* (*CR* 11:783-88, dated 12 November 1548, Koehn, no. 148), 786. See also the preface to the second volume of Luther's Latin works, *MBW* 4277 (*CR* 6:155-70), dated 1 June 1546, especially 6:160-61, where he identified Luther with John the Baptist.
- 47 See Irena Backus, *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation (1378-1615)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003), pp. 326-38.
- 48 Backus, *Historical Method*, p. 335.
- 49 Scheible, *Die Anfänge*, 15: "Welt bleibt welt, darümb bleiben auch gleiche hendel in der welt, ob schon die personen absterben."
- 50 *CR* 13:504, from his *Elementa Rhetorices* of 1542 (*VD* 16:M3111), described in Scheible, *Melancthon*, 89, as also being found in the first edition of 1531 (*VD* 16:3101).
- 51 See, for example, his comments on Colossians 2:8 in his *Scholia in epistulam Pauli ad Colossenses* (*Melancthons Werke in Auswahl* [*Studienausgabe*], ed. Robert Stupperich, 7 vols. [Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1951-1975] 4:241).

- ⁵² See also his introduction to the *Chronicon Carionis* of 1558, *CR* 12:713-16: “Praecipue historia opus est in Ecclesia. Primum, quia Deus immensa bonitate sua se patefecit, et patefactiones suas scribi voluit. ... Secundo, ut libri prophetici melius intelligantur, omnium temporum historia complectenda est. ... Tertio, ad diiudicationes gravissimarum controversiarum prodest nosse historias. ... Postremo et haec ingens utilitas adsidue cogitanda est, in collatione historiarum ethnicarum et nostrarum. In historiis ethnicis tantum cernuntur exempla irae Dei, contra atrocita scelara. ... At in historia Ecclesiae utriusque generis exempla proponuntur, Exempla irae in poenis ... item exempla misericordiae seu gratiae, quae ad Evangelium referantur.”
- ⁵³ See the 1558 edition of the *Chronicon Carionis*, *CR* 12:723 (“Ecclesiae initium est ipsa creatio hominis, cum illis donis, quae errant data, ut Deum celebrarent”).
- ⁵⁴ *CR* 24:205.
- ⁵⁵ *CR* 24:205
- ⁵⁶ See also *MBW* 2341 (*CR* 3:1115).
- ⁵⁷ *CR* 24:205.
- ⁵⁸ On the Turks, see, for example, *MBW* 1960 (*CR* 3:440-446), his preface to Francesco Negri’s Latin translation of Paolo Giovio’s *Turcicarum rerum commentarius* (Wittenberg, 1537), addressed to Duke Johann Ernst of Saxony and dated October 1537. For his work on the Bible, see, Timothy J. Wengert, “The Biblical Commentaries,” pp. 106-48.
- ⁵⁹ Here are some instances where he used this story. *MBW* 1177, to Johannes Carion dated 17 August 1531; *MBW* 7688 (*CR* 8:663-66), preface to the reader of Christoph Lasius, *Das güldene Kleinot vom verlorren Schaf* (Wittenberg: Lufft, 1556), dated 15 January 1556; Manlius, *Locorum*, 1:13 (book inscription from 1560); *CR* 8:79 (a note to students in 1553 to attend Johannes Piscator’s lectures on arithmetic); *CR* 12:717 (the *Chronicon* of 1558); *CR* 24:563 (postil). See the description in Scheible, *Melanchthon*, pp. 254-56. The *Cabala* was actually citing Rabbi Eliahu in the Babylonian Talmud. See also Heinz Scheible, *Philipp Melanchthon: Eine Gestalt der Reformationszeit* (Karlsruhe: Landesbildstelle Baden, 1995), pp. 115f., for a photograph of Melanchthon’s 1557 book inscription of the same quotation in Hebrew, Latin and German.
- ⁶⁰ *CR* 24:717. The ending, like in many such oracles, sounds like a riddle. “Traditio domus Eliae. Sex millia annorum mundus, et deinde conflagratio. Duo millia inane. Duo millia lex. Duo millia dies Messiae. Et propter peccata nostra, quae multa et magna sunt, deerunt anni qui deerunt.”

- ⁶¹ Scheible, *Melanchthon*, pp. 251-56, points out that this represented a clear break with other histories that had used seven empires to divide the work.
- ⁶² The preface is found in *MBW* 9269 (*CR* 9:1073-77, dated 25 March 1560 and addressed to Archbishop Sigismund von Magdeburg). The purpose of studying history is to drive Christians to prayer and repentance and to give the church a sure compass for navigating in these last days.
- ⁶³ See also his introduction to the 1558 *Chronicon Carionis*, *CR* 12:719.
- ⁶⁴ Cf. *MBW* 8050 (unpublished), 9 December 1556 to David Chytraeus. According to *MBW*, vol. 7:521, Melanchthon described how “überall verfallen die Reiche.”
- ⁶⁵ *CR* 10:635f. (cf. *CR* 12:901).